

Marisa D'Vari roams over to Roero DOCG in search of great value Nebbiolo and finds an obscure Piemontese grape, alongside the locals' favourites, Barbera and Arneis. Photos by Marisa.

Pondering Piemonte outside the box

With the recent multimillion dollar acquisition of Vietti, the historic Barolo winery, increases in the price of the region's wine and its vineyards are certain to occur. If you love Piemontese wine, however, you can find excellent examples of Nebbiolo, Barbera and Arneis from smaller Barolo producers, as well as from overlooked quality areas such as Roero DOCG.

Roero is a gorgeous region of north-west Italy, offering romantic hillside views, beautifully preserved castles, Romanesque churches and producers putting an increasing emphasis on high quality wine. One example of a Roero producer making very high-end Nebbiolo is Malvira, created in the 1950s by the determined Giuseppe Damonte, who knew the quality the area offered before it was made into a DOCG. The emphasis at Malvira is on single vineyards, each with unique soil that lends itself to a specific variety. They rival the famous names in Barolo in terms of aromas, flavours, balance and complexity.

Barbera breaking through

Ask a Piemonte local what their favourite wine is and "Barbera" is the likely answer. Virtually every winery produces this variety, which is usually matured in different ways to suit a particular taste and price point. One of the most memorable Barbera wines on this visit was the rich and complex Cascina Castlet Superiore, Barbera d'Asti DOCG, from the Litina vineyard. I also very much liked the rich, jammy 2015 Barbera d'Alba Valdisera, a co-operative wine from Terre del Barolo. The large family-owned Tenuta Carretta produces a wide range of fine wines, including the excellent 2011 Mora di Sassi Barbera d'Asti Superiore from Nizza, with rich, sharply focused aromas of black fruit.

Ruchè: another tannic Piemontese grape

In the past, the Ruchè grape has not received very much attention. It is a rather obscure local variety that shares some similarities with the major Piemontese grape, Nebbiolo, in that it tends to produce very tannic, light coloured wines with pronounced aromas and bouquet. The sleek, modern Montalbera winery is doing incredible things with this variety, especially as it produces 70% of the world's Ruchè. The 2015 Laccetto (which means 'The accent') is made from 90% of overripe, late-harvest grapes and 10% of grapes that have been dried in the cellar in a sterilised and temperature-controlled room. This Ruchè wine is quite delicious – it falls somewhere between a Nebbiolo and an Amarone with its rich, brandied cherry flavour.

Arneis: the producer's pride and joy

Virtually every producer takes special pride in producing Arneis, the local and rather neutral white variety. One excellent example is from Antonio Coscia, the fourth-generation winemaker of his family's Costa Catterina winery. His brown eyes sparkle as he pours me a delicious glass of Arneis wine he has named Arselvel, meaning 'sympatico'. Arneis is also a favourite of the Malvira winery, which produces it in



Left: Giacomo Damonte of Malvira in Roero.

sparkling, still and sweet (late harvest) styles. If that wasn't enough, Malvira's young winemaker Giacomo Damonte also makes an Arneis wine without added sulphur (with the label proclaiming this), and he pours me a taste of an aged Arneis from their Saglietto vineyard.

Agriturismo and restaurants on the rise

A significant trend in the region is the increasing number of producers building accommodation adjacent to their wineries to create an *agriturismo* or bed and breakfast facility. Among the newest additions are the cosy rooms built by Costa Catterina, which is run by owner Antonio's lovely wife Antonella. One luxurious example of a glamorous *agriturismo* is Villa Tiboldi, which is owned by Malvira, with its breathtaking views from individual terraces. Tenuta Carretta has elegant rooms as well. The *agriturismo* concept is beneficial both for the wineries and the guests, as wineries can benefit from the extra income, as well as the publicity, and guests can enjoy the pleasure of staying in a winery setting.

More wineries all over Piemonte are building restaurants or forming associations with them. Malvira has the kind of upscale restaurant favoured by the glitterati, offering its own wines as well as favourites from the Piemonte area, as does Tenuta Carretta. Sylla Sebaste has formed a relationship with a local, well-respected chef who creates seasonal multi-course menus for visitors to the winery.

For the most part, the local Roero winemaking families are focusing even more narrowly on what they do best: growing good grapes and making good wine.

